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THE FAILURE OF CAPITALISM IN GREAT WARS

Absolute Monarchy and Absolute Democracy, Says England's Brilliant Catholic Socialist, Alone Can Meet National Disasters.

By G. K. Chesterton

THE government of men by men is very close to their government by a man. In both cases the ruling element is more or less what we call human nature. In all history there has been but one step from democracy to despotism; and the two were often found to be fighting for the same thing. Such a position as that of the great Napoleon is greatly misrepresented by those, including the Emperor, who called it an empire. It might much more truly be said that France was one constituency and returned one member. But an oligarchy, or government by one class, can be quite unrepresentative. And of an aristocracy (that is, an oligarchy with a code) it can still be said that it is not national even though it is patriotic. It is a curious irony that perhaps the only example left of the ancient European monarchy is the modern American Republic. In the present perilous parley of the nations President Wilson can literally call himself America, in the sense that Henry V called himself England or St. Louis called himself France. The mediæval king was precisely what the American President is and is called in the American Constitution. He was the Executive, and the people looked to him to execute things. Also to execute people—especially rich people.

ISOLATION.

Now this democratic element in monarchy rests upon a very real though not invariable fact of human nature. To crown a man is to isolate him, and to isolate him is, sometimes, though not always, to make him think. That is the genuine psychological truth behind the old talk of Divine Right and of how the sovereign was responsible only to God. It must be remembered that such responsibility was decidedly alarming for people who (quaintly enough) happened to believe in God. The idea was to disconnect the man from common social influences.

It was to set him, so to speak, on the top of a tower, where he could find no comfort unless he could find it in the stars. It was to crush him with an almost cosmic load of care—to make him feel like Atlas. Thus it was hoped that even a fool might become wise, out of sheer terror at the omnipotence of his own folly. And sometimes, nay, often, the idea did work as it was meant to work. The best record of such good examples is probably to be found in that elective monarchy which is curiously like the republic, and is the oldest institution in Europe—the Papacy. The very reiteration of the fact that Alexander VI and one or two other Popes were bad is itself a proof that most of them were good.

It must be vividly realized that oligarchy, good or bad, cannot possibly have this kind of advantage. It is the essence of oligarchy that it is sociable within certain limits. The aristocrat can never be the strongest man, the man who stands most alone. He can never have the kind of awful dignity and humility which is made by mixing the strength of God with the weakness of man. Those two are company, but three is only society. The result is this very practical difference: That the superiority of a king may stimulate conscience, while the superiority of a class must lull it. The oligarchs comfort each other; they create a climate for themselves which is both rare and relaxing. A wronged or ruined servant could often get mercy out of a king, but who ever heard of getting mercy out of a club? This very real defect, the existence of rich men comforting and condoning each other, is present even in the really chivalrous and responsible oligarchies. And we in this plutocratic age are ruled by the most unchivalrous and most irresponsible oligarchy that history has ever known.

The power of the dead capitalists in our time is quite unlike any power, despotic or aristocratic, that has existed hitherto. The first important difference is this: That while its power is public, the wielders of that power are private. There have been many incompetent rulers, many incongruous coalitions, many jobs which put inadequate personalities into positions requiring strong ones. But such people had to be inadequate in public. Men may sometimes have been ruled by something like an aristocracy of fools. But we are ruled by a secret society of fools. A man like Addington wanted to be Prime Minister and had to be a bad Prime Minister and hear all the boys in the town saying:

"Pitt is to Addington
As London is to Paddington."

Colleagues like Lord North and Charles Fox were strange bedfellows, but they went to bed in broad daylight. People could joke about the generous and rather shameless Radical tied almost to the corpse of the cynical and very diplomatic Tory. But no one in considering the coalition of Marshall and Snelgrove has ever been known to distinguish between the generosity and shamelessness of Snelgrove and the cynicism and diplomacy of Marshall. Yet there are probably more Christian people directly doing what they are told by Marshall and Snelgrove than ever did what they were told by Charles Fox.

FLATTERY AND POLITICS.

The ruling personalities of the past were often flattered, but only in the sense in which Shakespeare speaks of the sun flattering a mountain. The mountain was gilded rather than whitewashed. It was set in its most agreeable light, but it was not hidden away. It is said that Louis XIV was really short, but that the courtiers really thought he was tall. But in that case there must have been something rather fine about Louis, as well as something rather fanciful about the courtiers.

GILBERT K. CHESTERTON.

Who points out the differences between military secrecy and commercial secrecy and the quality of reality in a state at war.

Whether Mr. Horlick, who makes the malted milk, is short or tall I have no information, and there is nothing about him for the fancy to feed upon. Yet it is more and more plain in our politics and even our religion that these invisible millionaires make a pressure behind multitudes of practical proposals, and are the real rulers of the state. The politicians who appear in the caricatures are merely comic masks—the masks of the mysterious kings whose faces no man may see.

PERILS OF SECRECY.

It is in this secrecy that we find the first of those weaknesses which unfit a capitalistic state for the waging of war. What is called a military secret is not only different but almost opposite to a commercial secret. It may be desirable in some military matter that certain things should be known only to certain men, but those men are public men. Even when it is a secret matter it is not merely a private matter. Lord Kitchener may send a sealed communication to Sir John French, but it is not too much to say that Sir John French knows whom it comes from. It is only because the men are official that they are permitted such temporary concealment; their privacy exists because of their publicity. It is not so with the hints, advices, scares and scoops of the purely commercial world. Sometimes the financier does not know where the tip comes from; sometimes he would rather not say. Personal responsibility, the plain certainty about which man has earned a medal and which man a bullet, is the very soul of war, and it is the very antithesis of finance. It is impossible to take part in the work of a regiment without having a place and name which are known, but the method of taking part in a business venture includes the possibility of being anything from a sleeping partner who still parades the name to the nameless partner who is not sleeping but dangerously wide awake. Only recently two men were imprisoned as traitors under their own names, when they had long traded under somebody else's.

THE FATALITY OF UNREALITY.

The second weakness of capitalism in war is this: That war deals with realities and finance often with unrealities. If a stock broker sells a hundred shares in North Pole building estate and buys instead two hundred shares in the Venetian Irrigation Company, it would be quite a mistake to expect from him any very bright information either about gondolas or polar bears. The Republic of St. Mark and the northern axis of the earth might never have existed for all that concerns his transaction. But if an officer is told to send back a hundred cavalry and call up two hundred infantry instead, it is on the whole desirable that he should know a horse when he sees it. And a horse being a living thing, there are all sorts of surprises in a horse different from those in an arbitrary list of prices, and the more the soldier treats the horse as an actual thing with four legs the better soldier he will be. All the elements that make for booms and slumps, prestige, advertisement, gossip, fashion, boycott, have nothing to do with war. You cannot boycott a better gun than your own, and it is quite useless to advertise a worse one. The modern commercial newspapers, owned by big financiers, are quite puzzled when they find that you cannot bull the Germans or bear the Russians, or, indeed, induce either of them to take the least notice of you. The soldier is concerned with wars and not with rumors of wars.

But the heaviest handicap of all for a capitalist state when at war is that it causes friction between the arts of war and the arts of peace, and that by a vital difference that is covered by a false comparison. The soldier and the workman are commonly of the same social class, and the rather snobbish people who judge mostly by such class atmospheres fall into the habit of demanding from the workman the impersonal obedience of the soldier. The elementary difference is, of course, that the soldier is not working for the profit of the officer; if he were he would be quite justified in declining to work for it. He is working for the profit of the whole people; he is paid by the whole people, and if he disobeys the officer he is disloyal to the whole people. But the workman in a capitalist state works for the enrichment of certain individuals, and is quite justified in doubting whether the enrichment of those individuals is even a good thing for the country, in the sense in which armed self-defence is certainly a good thing for the country.

Why the Soldiers in the Trenches Jeered at Lord Northcliffe's Anti-Kitchener and the Rotten Shells Campaign.

SPEAKING OF ———

Two practical examples from recent English history will illustrate the point. A millionaire who had succeeded chiefly by selling a sort of journalistic sweet stuff, which has in our time replaced the much more respectable output of Penny Dreadfuls, suffered in his later years from a delusion common in his small class—the idea that he had been called into the councils of the state. He commanded all the harassed Fleet Street clerks dependent upon him to launch an attack on the principal British general for having ordered what he called "the wrong kind of shell." The wrong kind of shell would presumably mean a kind of shell that could not be fired off, or that was not worth firing off; so the popular inference was that the other generals in the field had let their guns stand idle or had amused themselves by firing charges that were practically blank. What the right kind of shell would have been neither the millionaire nor the public had the most distant idea. The truth is, of course, that the phrase was like talking of the transport mule as the wrong kind of horse. Many kinds of shells are used and ought to be used. But when some stray sheets emanating from the millionaire found their way to the trenches there was an outburst of anger among the soldiers, merely at the insult to the chief representative of the trade of soldiering. And the root of the anger was the simple realization that, shells or no shells, Lord Kitchener was not making a profit out of the war, and Lord Northcliffe was.

At almost the same time two other rich men, whose control over their workers was the same as Lord Northcliffe's control over his pressmen, were found to be actually increasing their profits by providing ammunition for the enemy. They were condemned, but for some unaccountable reason the condemnation of them was hardly harsher than the hired condemnation of the general for what could only have been at worst a mistake. Now, suppose there had been at any time, as very probably there was (the whole of their corner of Scotland had been seething with industrial discontent), a dispute between them and their employes such as might culminate in a strike. In that case the kind of club gossip which the comfortable classes call "public opinion" would undoubtedly have lectured the men for their selfishness in stopping the mercantile output of the world. In short, they would have been blamed for not having worked for Jacks, when Jacks was working for Krupp. They would have been rebuked for their lack of public spirit in not filling the private pocket of a traitor.

SOCIALISM AND PEASANT PROPRIETORSHIP.

There are two ways and only two ways in which the man who works can rationally be under the same discipline as the man who fights. The first is that the worker, like the soldier, should always be the direct servant of the state, and know that his leaders are merely paid a proper wage like himself. The other is so to organize the economic state that every ordinary man retains the whole profit of any work he does, and is therefore literally working for his home as well as his country. The first of these proposals is called Socialism. The second is generally called Peasant Proprietorship, and is the foundation of all the most fundamentally military nations from France to Montenegro.

The Invention Board---Symbol of America's Future

By George Henry Payne

NECESSITY, better known as the mother of invention, has called her sons as an aid to soothe the troubled world-mind.

The inventor works for peace—his greatest war triumphs have been Industry's greatest prizes.

America will find through her call to invention a Nation Spirit, as France found it in Art, and Germany has found it in Kultur. Peace and progress are but little half-sisters of Invention. They come after Invention, never before it.

This Is a Prophecy---That the Mobilization of the Inventive Genius of Industrial America Initiates a Period of Zest for Creating New Things That in Vision Is An American "Age of Pericles."

"HUTCH," said the "Old Man,"—for so he is known through the antonomastic habit of those who work with him—"Hutch," and the light of assurance and prophecy came into Edison's eyes, "we're the biggest nation on earth, and I tell you we ought to have the biggest, damnedest navy in the world. There's no reason why we should be second to any nation. We don't want war, we want peace; but we ought to be in a position to see that no one interferes with our desire for peace."

And then the "Old Man," "Hutch" tells me, having uttered these sentiments, which to tender souls may seem very vigorous, turned abruptly and went back to his twenty-hour-a-day job of enabling America to produce her aniline dyes without regard to where war happens to raise its hoary head—a very practical kind of peace work.

"Hutch," in scientific and naval circles, in the patent office, the technical magazines, the government reports and even to the Queen of England, who once gave him a medal, is Miller Reese Hutchison, chief engineer of that city known as the Edison Manufacturing Plant and Laboratories, and personal representative of Thomas A. Edison. To "Hutch," this unassuming and modest scientist who is even less inclined to talk that Edison himself, the "Old Man" had relegated the task of setting forth his views as to what the new Board of Invention and Development that has been called to the aid of the Navy Department means.

In the first place, it is more or less essential to clear up certain misunderstandings about this innovation of having a board of inventors and civilian experts assist the regular navy authorities.

Such men as Colonel W. C. Church, the editor of "The Army and Navy Journal," have looked at the suggestion of the formation of this board with little favor, for they believe that the navy needs bolstering up in other and more important lines. Others have seen in it an invocation to the war spirit, through turning the attention of some of America's most conspicuous and able citizens to the manufacture and invention of weapons of destruction.

The Board of Invention will interfere with no other line of naval development, and it is the opinion of Edison himself that it will make more for peace and the inventions of peace than any other single movement.

As Mr. Edison's personal representative it was Mr. Hutchison himself who arranged the meeting between Secretary Daniels and the great inventor. A very modest man is this same Mr. Hutchison, refusing to speak at all of his own inventions or his refusal to go on the board himself, and even requesting that the naked facts of "Who's Who," with its long list of honors, be omitted in commenting on what he had to say.

"All over the country," said Mr. Hutchison, "men are working at inventions of all kinds. Necessarily, the main tendency of this feverish activity at present is to produce means of defence for the country. The Board of Invention will have to do simply with that division of the body politic, and will in no way interfere with the work or the plans of the navy.

"As I understand the matter of the proposed Board of Experts:

"First. When ideas are submitted by civilians or personnel of the navy, such communications will be addressed to the Secretary of the Navy.

"Second. The Secretary will turn these suggestions over to the Naval Board, consisting of an officer of rank, having a staff of experts selected from the personnel of the navy. This officer in charge will in turn turn the suggestions over to such of his aids as are competent to separate the chaff from the wheat, and who will make such recommendations to their chief as they see fit and proper.

"Third. If the staff is impressed with an idea as being logical and highly desirable, it will so advise their chief. He will then confer with such of them as are best qualified for expert opinion, or will communicate with such other officers of the navy as may be qualified to advise the naval head of the board.

"Fourth. If it is the consensus of opinion that the idea presented is of value, and if the Naval Board desires advice from any of the experts of the consulting board, such expert as is best qualified to pass on the feasibility of the idea, or give expert opinion regarding it, is communicated with by the head of the Naval Board.

"Fifth. When this expert, or these experts, receive a request from the head of the Naval Board for an opinion as to the feasibility of the idea and suggestions as to whether or not, in their estimation, it would pay to investigate the matter further experimentally, he or they will so advise the head of the board, without entering into any long-winded discussion as to the pros and cons. An affirmative answer from such an expert will then justify the Naval Board in turning the proposed invention over to the laboratory head, who will in turn assign such man or men as he may have on his corps of assistants to work the idea up with a view of embodying it for use by the navy into a concrete, practical apparatus.

"As I see it, the Board of Experts will not be a board at all, but simply a number of highly qualified specialists in their particular lines who, by reason of their intimate knowledge of the various arts and sciences, will give the government the benefit of the experience and knowledge gained by simply passing on and suggesting lines of research concerning new ideas presented. I do not see that this will entail very much work on the part of members of the board of consulting engineers (whichever they may be called). Neither do I think that they should be called upon to spend a great deal of time on each subject. They serve in the same capacity as a specialist in stomach troubles serves when called in for consultation.

"Before an invention is turned down by the Naval Board, unless it is a foolish suggestion and on the face of it a waste of time for further consideration, the Secretary of the Navy should be advised that same is being turned down and the reasons briefly stated. He will then be able to consult with such experts as he may deem qualified to give him a personal opinion. This to act as a check on the Naval Board.

"Similarly, when the Naval Board approves of and desires to further investigate, by experimentation, after the civilian board of experts has favorably passed on the proposition, the matter should be submitted to the Secretary, with the reasons briefly stated as to why the matter is to be investigated further.

"I therefore do not feel that the experts appointed by the engineering societies should be detail men at all. They should be men of very large calibre, with great breadth of vision and keen insight, rather than of accurate detail knowledge of and long actual working experience on given subjects. Naturally, a man who is fitted to go on such a board must have had long detailed experience with a subject regarding which he is supposed to be an expert, but he should have arrived at the point where he is no longer called upon to do detail work, but because of knowledge gained by such long experience and study he is qualified as an adviser.

"The plan is to have the present adequate and very able Naval Board look over every invention and when in doubt simply refer to a member of the consulting board.

Continued on seventh page.

Thomas Edison, the grand old dean of American inventive science, talking ideas with Miller Reese Hutchison, his young "right arm."